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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this brochure is to assist parents of young children to recognize opportunities in everyday life to help their young children to become good readers and to suggest ways in which parents can take advantage of these opportunities. It is recommended that, first of all, parents should develop a reading habit in themselves and fill the home with a sense of reading excitement and interest. Also, parents should look for situations which could lead to reading interest, listen to the children, correct the children's pronunciation, speak clearly to them, and show enthusiasm in the children's studying. The physical and emotional fitness of the children are emphasized. Recommendations are made of simple ways to make the children independent in reading, with a stress on the parents' setting an example themselves. Finally, the brochure gives suggestions on the selection of children's books. This brochure is one of a series commissioned by the National Reading Center to help inform all citizens about reading issues and to promote national functional literacy. (AW)

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NATIONAL READING CENTER

**HELPING
THE BEGINNING
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WITH READING**

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National Reading Center
1776 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
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HELPING THE BEGINNING SCHOOL CHILD WITH READING

Opportunities present themselves all day long for parents to help their first, second and third graders—their beginning readers—to become good readers for a lifetime. The purpose of this brochure is to assist you in recognizing some of these opportunities and to suggest ways in which you can take advantage of them.

HOW TO BEGIN

First, and most important, if you want your child to become a confident, eager reader, develop a good reading atmosphere in your home. Parents who are readers themselves fill a home with a sense of reading excitement and interest. Parent-readers always have books, magazines and newspapers lying about and read news items, jokes and comments aloud to each other. They make use of their library and buy books, and they talk about what they have read and they read about things that interest them. By being a reading-parent, they *live* the kind of reading behavior they hope for in their children. By example, they are demonstrating that reading has value and importance.

Secondly, learn to look for situations that could lead to reading interest—mealtime, bedtime, shopping time, TV time, or vacation time—all become natural occasions for directly or indirectly developing a reading habit. Many word games can be played at such times. For example, how many things that are worn start with the letter 's'? Take turns thinking of rhyming words and riddles. A new ending can be made up about a TV program, or a new story can be made up using the same characters. A good book can be located about the period or places shown on a specific show that will tell more. Stimulating initial interest and providing means of development is always

valuable. Use books on vacation trips to help learn facts—identify trees, birds, shells—anything related to the area where you are vacationing. Show your children how to *find* information. Read them descriptions from books and encourage them to collect leaves, minerals, etc., and classify them. Since children are natural collectors, the accumulation of objects can become a sustained project.

You can help your child become a good reader by listening to him when he wants to tell you about things that happened during the day, or a story he has made up. If he wants to read to you, listen attentively. React as you would in your own reading, with laughter or exclamation. Positive response is a valuable tool in encouragement.

Correct pronunciation will also help your child with his reading. Speak clearly when you speak to him, and encourage him to speak with some precision, too, without being overly fussy. First and second graders sometimes find sh, th, r, l, s, zh, and wh difficult to enunciate. If you are a model of good pronunciation yourself, the child's urge to imitate will usually lead him to pronounce correctly, too.

When children come home from school with books and other materials, show interest, give encouragement and provide a suitable place for them to study and work. Have other members of the family show consideration for a child who is studying or reading silently. Don't be too quick to criticize and don't apply pressure, especially with learning to read. Criticism acts as a damper rather than an incentive, and can create a "what's the use" reaction far faster than an "I'll try harder".

If a child needs help, give it, but don't do all the homework yourself. If you don't understand something a child has to do, ask the teacher about it. If a child is having difficulty, find out from his teacher how you can best help him. Have eyes and ears checked before children start school and frequently thereafter, and have them get plenty of rest. Urge the children in your family to help each other

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and avoid comparing the accomplishments of older children with those of the younger. Remember that a healthy and happy child with many interests will usually do well in reading, while the unhappy youngster with narrow interests may have more difficulty. It is not necessary to concentrate all your attention on reading directly, because well developed interests contribute to reading development.

Expose your children to a wide range of experiences that spark interests. Take them to zoos, movies, museums, stores that sell different kinds of goods. Share the experience and talk about it in such a way that they bring understanding to what they see and do and relate it to other experiences they have had. Entertainment that is taken in slowly in this manner provides time for talk and understanding. Remember to listen as your children notice things; answer questions and encourage other family members to do so.

READING INDEPENDENCE

Take advantage of simple ways of making your children independent in reading. Occasionally pack a little note in their lunches for them to read. Put up a chalkboard or message board in the house and leave notes for them and have them leave notes for you. Have them read you recipes from the book when you are cooking. Have them pick out packages in the store while you shop and read names and other information to you.

Try not to treat a vacation as if it is a time when reading and all other school connected activities are to be left behind. *Reading, like talking, should be treated as a natural part of life.* When you go on trips of any length, a good supply of reading material should accompany you. Take along some short stories, tall tales, folk tales for variety, while driving along. Shorter pieces are usually best. A book of songs and several books of poems provide enough variety so that each member of the family can select his favorite to sing or say.

There are many good anthologies and books of selections to choose from, among them Nancy Larrick's *Piping Down the Valleys Wild*, (Dell Paperback), William Cole's *Oh, What Nonsense* and *Oh, How Silly* (Viking Seafarer Paperbacks), John Ciardi's *I Met a Man* (Houghton Mifflin Co.), Richard Lewis' *Miracles* (Simon & Schuster) and Majorie B. Smiley's and others *Creatures in Versa* (Macmillan Co.). Paperback books are especially good for leaving in the car; they are inexpensive and take up little room.

Singing songs together as a family can help develop reading-related skills. It improves pronunciation and expands children's experience with rhyming patterns, synonyms, (words that mean the same thing) and homonyms, (words that sound alike) and gives them fairly easy language patterns to imitate and understand. Songs containing riddles ("I Gave My Love a Cherry"), giving directions ("Clap Your Hands"), repeating sentences ("On Top of Old Smokey"), and telling stories ("Hey, Jimmy Joe John Jim Jack"), and so forth, can become useful ways to reinforce school experiences with reading and other language activities (though there's no need to point this out while you are doing it!)

If your song repertoire is low, invest in a few records of songs made specifically for children, for example, Pete Seeger's *American Folk Songs for Children* (Folkways) and The Limeliter's *Through Children's Eyes* (RCA Victor). *Adventures in Rhythm* with Ella Jenkins (Folkways) is an interesting album.

Maps, too, can help reading. Point out the names of towns and distances on the map as you travel. Read about places you are traveling through and going to. Play treasure hunt by drawing directions on a series of maps accompanied by written directions that give clues to the next hiding place. Have a reward for the winner.

Also, when travelling, see how many state names you get from license plates as you drive. Write the names down. Make up songs spelling the state's or the river's name—such as Susquehanna or Mississippi.

PARENT SETS PATTERN

Owning a few well-loved and many-times-read books of his own is important to a child's developing image of himself as a reader. If you are lucky enough to have a good bookstore nearby, go browsing, and take your children along. Establish a family tradition of always giving at least one book as a gift for Christmas or birthdays.

Magazine and newspaper reviews can assist you in selecting books to borrow or buy for your children. Television and radio programs sometimes offer information about new books, or interview a children's book author or illustrator. Encourage your newspaper and stations to review more children's books and to sponsor, or at least give publicity to, bookfairs and special exhibits and events at the library.

The following are helps to remember when selecting books for your children:

1. Buy the book to appeal to the child—rather than assuming what you find appealing will naturally appeal to him.
2. Let the child have a say in getting the book.
3. Be sure he can read the book you choose.
4. A more difficult book can be selected if it is to be read aloud.
5. Select a book for a style of illustration that will appeal to the child.
6. By selecting a book for an individual child, you are telling him he is unique, a person known by the book company he keeps—a reader! In the reading atmosphere you have developed, it is the ultimate compliment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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